Interior Appropriations Bill: Pell Statements (1990): Speech 07

Claiborne Pell

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STATEMENT OF SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL

Mr. President, I rise in support of this amendment. Our debate on the future of the National Endowments reminds me of a story I know concerning Winston Churchill. In the darkest days of the Second World War, when the outcome of the conflict was still unknown, a young staffer on the Prime Minister’s staff found to his shock that the government had been fully funding the British Arts Council throughout the war. He went running to Mr. Churchill and informed him that he had found more funds for the war effort, and how extraordinary it was that scarce resources were going for such a purpose when the Empire was in the midst of a life and death struggle. I am told that Winston Churchill turned to the young man and replied: "I would remind you, this is exactly what we are fighting for."

Rather than being a subsidy for the wealthy, one of the primary missions of the NEA has been to encourage the spread of American culture beyond those individuals, communities and regions affluent enough to afford it. Uncharacteristically among federal programs, Endowment dollars multiply and foster national support for the arts. Yearly Endowment grants draw matching grants of approximately $1.4 billion from private, state and local patrons.

I think it is rather unfair to our citizens for some individuals to assert that only wealthy Americans are interested in the development of the arts. I firmly believe and the evidence supports the fact that Americans from every walk of life, from every economic level, strongly desire and seek access to cultural events in their communities for themselves and for their children.
From an economic point of view, the dollars sent by the Arts Endowment to communities around the nation have been an extraordinarily successful investment. For every dollar the Endowment invests, there is created a tenfold return in jobs, services and contracts. The arts fostered by the National Endowment encourage national and international tourism, attract and retain businesses in our communities, stimulate real estate development, increase production of exportable copyrighted materials and contribute to the tax base. Governors and mayors from around the country can attest to the manner in which Endowment supported projects have breathed new life into the downtown areas of their towns and cities. New businesses and tourists congregate in those areas which have a developed cultural life. San Antonio, Texas; Cleveland, Ohio; Greenville, Mississippi; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; and Birmingham, Alabama are among the cities whose studies have shown the enormous economic contribution of the arts.

Mr. President, this tiny investment in our nation's culture makes a statement to ourselves and to the world that we view the development of American culture and its availability to our citizens as of significant importance. We must not become the only Western industrialized nation to declare that our government cares nothing for the development of our culture. I hope my colleagues will support this amendment.